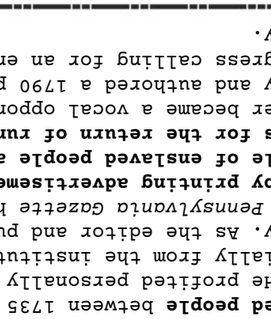
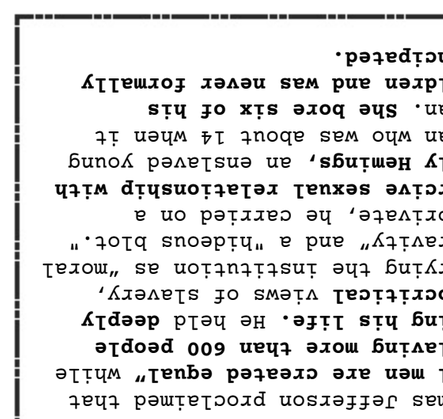


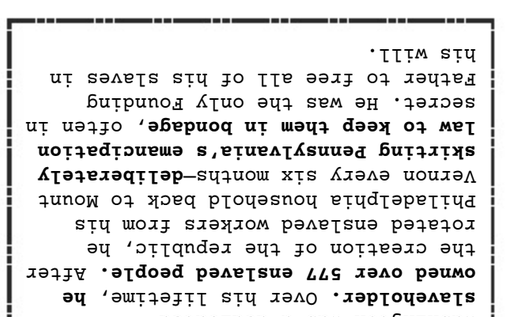
John Adams

John Adams was the only Founding Father to **never own a slave**, calling slavery a **"foul contagion"** and an **"evil of colossal magnitude."** However, Adams was **not a major proponent of abolitionism**, writing to two abolitionists in 1801 that abolition "must be gradual and accomplished with much caution and Circumspection." In this correspondence he also stated: **"I have been informed, that the condition, of the common Sort of White People in some of the Southern states particularly Virginia, is more oppressed, degraded and miserable than that of the Negroes,"** a remark that was patently untrue.



James Madison

James Madison was another Founding Father who held **contradictory views on slavery**, describing it as a **"moral crime"** that violated Republic principles. He owned over **100 enslaved people** during his life and only emancipated one person. He brought enslaved people to the White House and ultimately sold them for personal profit. He **cowered behind fears that confronting slavery directly would destroy the fragile, newly formed United States.**



America was never great.

Kasper

made this ring in 2026

for Geek Weekly Fanzine's USA @ 250 mini-zine project

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The Great Paradox of the New Republic:

The Founding Fathers & Slavery

1776

USA @ 250

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

- **Founding Fathers, The Declaration of Independence**

George Washington

At the time of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, George Washington was a **dedicated slaveholder.** Over his lifetime, **he owned over 577 enslaved people.** After the creation of the republic, he rotated enslaved workers from his Philadelphia household back to Mount Vernon every six months—**deliberately skirting Pennsylvania's emancipation law to keep them in bondage,** often in secret. He was the only Founding Father to free all of his slaves in his will.

Thomas Jefferson

Thomas Jefferson proclaimed that **"all men are created equal"** while **enslaving more than 600 people during his life.** He held **deeply hypocritical** views of slavery, decrying the institution as "moral depravity" and a "hideous blot." In private, he carried on a **coercive sexual relationship with Sally Hemings,** an enslaved young woman who was about 14 when it began. **She bore six of his children and was never formally emancipated.**

Benjamin Franklin

Benjamin Franklin owned at least **7 enslaved people** between 1735 and 1781. He profited personally and financially from the institution of slavery. As the editor and publisher of the *Pennsylvania Gazette* he **earned money by printing advertisements for the sale of enslaved people and notices for the return of runaways.** He later became a vocal opponent of slavery and authored a 1790 petition to Congress calling for an end to slavery.